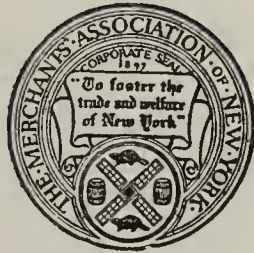


# The Merchants' Association of New York



- I: OPPOSING THE ABOLITION OR CURTAILMENT OF THE PNEUMATIC TUBE MAIL SERVICE IN ANY CITY WHERE IT NOW EXISTS.
- II: LETTER FROM HON. JOHN PURROY MITCHEL, MAYOR OF NEW YORK, TO HON. CHAMP CLARK, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, PROTESTING AGAINST ADDITIONAL MAIL TRUCKS IN THE CITY'S STREETS.

December, 1916

THE Board of Directors of The Merchants' Association of New York, at a meeting held Thursday, December 14, received a report from its Committee on Postal Affairs to the effect that it was the unanimous opinion of the Committee that the discontinuance of the pneumatic tube service and the substitution therefor of service by vehicle would be unfortunate and should be opposed by The Merchants' Association.

The Committee recommended that the Association reaffirm its attitude to the effect that the pneumatic mail service should be continued in its present scope in all cities where it is now installed, and that it be extended wherever conditions warrant.

The Board of Directors, after consideration, unanimously approved the recommendations of the Committee on Postal Affairs and directed that an argument in opposition to the recommendations of the Postmaster General as to the pneumatic tube service be prepared, subject to the approval of the Executive Committee and the President.

The argument thus authorized follows:

S. C. MEAD,  
*Secretary.*

NEW YORK, December 29, 1916.

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## OPPOSING THE ABOLITION OR CURTAILMENT OF THE PNEUMATIC TUBE MAIL SERVICE IN ANY CITY WHERE IT NOW EXISTS.

THE Postmaster General has recommended to Congress the abolition of the pneumatic tube mail service in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and St. Louis; its curtailment in Brooklyn, and its retention in New York under conditions which threaten to curtail it by about one-half, and which permit its entire abolition at the discretion of the Postmaster General.

The recommendations of the Postmaster General are based upon a report of a committee of subordinate postal officials, which report embodies the results of an investigation made by the committee as to the relative efficiency of auto vehicles and pneumatic tubes for the transmission of letter mail. Those results seemingly demonstrate that autos equal tubes in efficiency and that the substitution of autos for tubes would effect material economies without impairing the mail service.

This would be true if the facts stated in the report comprehended *all* the facts, and if the methods used in the investigation had been such as fully to develop and fairly to present those facts; but such is not the case. In the investigation vital factors were ignored or suppressed. By reason of their suppression false inferences were suggested, leading to fallacious conclusions. The utility of the tubes was minimized, and the practicable performance of autos under service conditions was grossly exaggerated. The methods of the investigation, its omission to develop and present essential facts, the questionable character of the so-called tests, and the fallacy of the conclusions inevitable

from an incomplete array of facts, were such as to render misleading and practically worthless the report upon which rest the recommendations of the Postmaster General.

Following are specifications:

1. The automobile tests were made under highly favorable selected conditions of minimum traffic congestion, and entire absence of obstruction by ice and snow.

2. The usual and necessary service routes, time schedules and requirements were disregarded.

3. Excessive and dangerous speed was made through crowded city streets.

4. The results of the speed tests made under exceptional and selected conditions were accepted as representing the practicable speed of autos throughout the year, under service conditions subject to wide variation.

5. The rapidity and capacity of the tubes was understated. On one occasion the operation of the tubes was retarded.

6. Two of the most important and useful functions of the tube service were ignored by the report.

# I. THE AUTOMOBILE TESTS WERE MADE UNDER HIGHLY FAVORABLE SELECTED CONDITIONS OF MINIMUM TRAFFIC CONGESTION AND ENTIRE ABSENCE OF OBSTRUCTION BY ICE AND SNOW.

Tests of the relative speed of autos and tubes in the transmission of mail were made in the several cities having tube service, with the exception of New York. All these tests, with three ex-



ceptions, were made in the months of July and August. The exceptions were made June 28 and 29 in Boston.

The speed at which vehicles can move through city streets is, of course, materially affected by the extent of the traffic therein. In all the large cities the traffic congestion in the business centers is extreme, and creates a condition exceedingly unfavorable to the rapid movement of vehicles. In the City of New York traffic counts were recently made during the months of maximum congestion. It was found that at the 464 crossings where police officers are stationed to regulate traffic an aggregate of about 3,407,000 vehicles and 15,545,000 pedestrians crossed within ten hours. The traffic at Columbus Circle (one mile north of 42nd Street) aggregated 39,000 vehicles and 81,990 pedestrians in ten consecutive hours. Similar conditions of extreme congestion prevail in the Chicago "loop district" and in the central areas of Boston, Philadelphia and St. Louis.

But the density of the congestion varies widely at different seasons. In the months of July and August it is at a minimum. During those months shipments of merchandise fall off greatly. Retail trade of many classes is at its lowest ebb, and the movement of delivery wagons is much reduced. A large proportion of pleasure or passenger autos are absent in country districts. These causes greatly reduce the volume of street traffic, and correspondingly increase the practicable speed.

In his testimony on this point before the House Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, Inspector Thomas Myers, the police officer in charge of traffic regulation in New York, stated that street traffic and consequent congestion falls off about 50 per cent during the months of July and August. Similar causes produce a similar falling off in other cities.

It is obvious that speed results obtained in the months when about one-half the usual number of vehicles are absent from the streets do not fairly represent the speed practicable during the remainder of the year.

It is a fact of common knowledge that city streets during a considerable part of every winter are badly obstructed by snow

and ice. So far as revealed by their report, this fact seemed to be unknown to the committee of post office employees. At any rate, no cognizance was taken of it.

The extent to which snow slows the movement of autos and disarranges mail movement was testified to December 14th before the House Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads by Mr. Edward M. Morgan, Postmaster of New York.

Mr. Morgan stated in substance that during a considerable part of last winter, because of snow, it was necessary in order to make train connections to allow autos as much as thirty minutes' extra running time—thus more than doubling the usual time. Mr. Morgan specified:

- December 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, 1915.
- February 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, 1916.
- March 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16 and 17, 1916.

as days when transportation was seriously interrupted by reason of storms, and the mail contractor was unable to meet the requirements of the service and live up to the existing schedules. The effect of these conditions is shown by the following quotations from the records of the hearing:

“MR. MORGAN: . . . The number of train connections missed and consequent delay to mails during December, 1915, and January, February and March, 1916, due to irregularities in mail wagon (auto) service occasioned by snow storms and resultant congested and slippery streets, was as follows:

December, 1915 .....	30
January, 1916 .....	8
February, 1916 .....	51
March, 1916 .....	120
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Total.....	209”

“THE CHAIRMAN: They missed the trains?”

“MR. MORGAN: Yes, sir, notwithstanding they were given thirty minutes headway.”

“MR. BENNET: You mean you start the mails several minutes earlier?”

“MR. MORGAN: Yes.”

“MR. BENNET: How many—how long a time?”

“MR. MORGAN: Usually about thirty minutes. For example, if we have to make a connection and our regular schedule is 2:30, we start the wagon out at 2 o'clock; and if we have to make a connection, the regular schedule being 4 o'clock, we start the wagon out at half-past three.”

The extent to which snow and ice obstructed the movement of mail vehicles in other cities is undoubtedly a matter of record in the several post offices. It is a vital factor in determining the relative utility of autos and tubes. The Committee could readily have obtained the information. So far as the record shows they made no attempt to do so, but completely ignored it.

## II. THE USUAL AND NECESSARY SERVICE ROUTES, TIME SCHEDULES AND SERVICE REQUIREMENTS WERE DISREGARDED.

The time normally required for mail vehicles to move between post offices and railroad stations, and from one branch office to another, is definitely and completely established as to every important office. The extent of that time is absolutely and conclusively demonstrated by daily and hourly experience, continued through every day in the year. As a result of this experience official time schedules are established. These schedules govern the movement of all mail vehicles.

The time allowed is that normally consumed by the vehicles in passing over their routes. It considers delays and interruptions to movement, occasioned by traffic congestion. It makes allowances for time consumed by stops made at intervening stations for the purpose of receiving and delivering mail.

The time allowance is governed by two imperative factors.



The vehicle must remain at the post office until the latest possible moment in order to permit it to carry the latest mails received. The time allowed for movement to its destination must be as short as is practicable to assure its arrival at the station in time to catch the connecting train. It is certain, therefore, that in every post office having a capable administration the time allowed for the movement of vehicles is the shortest time that it is safe to allow, as demonstrated by continuous experience.

In addition to the normal time allowance is the extraordinary allowance made necessary in winter by reason of snow and ice. Postmaster Morgan has testified that under frequently prevailing winter conditions more than twice the usual time is required. We have thus in the records of every post office absolute standards, derived from experience of actual service conditions, as to the performance of auto vehicles which may safely be relied upon.

The difference between these standards and the results of the so-called tests made in Chicago and Boston are so great as to bring the methods of the latter into question. Mail is daily transported by automobile from the Boston General Post Office to Upham's Corners over a route which is 4.4 miles long. Mail passing over this route goes first to the South Terminal Station, where it is transferred to another vehicle. It thence moves by way of the South Boston Station to Upham's Corners. The vehicle stops at each of the stations named. At the South Terminal the pouches are rehandled and separated for forwarding to different destinations by various routes. This process requires five minutes or more. An intervening stop is made at South Boston, where mails are received and delivered. The record of movement and distances is as follows:

	Official time	
	Distance	including stops
General Post Office to South Terminal	3/4 miles	15 min.
South Terminal to South Boston....	1 2/5 miles	15 min.
South Boston to Upham's Corners..	2 1/4 miles	15 min.
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Total.....	4.4 miles	45 min.

Average miles per hour under service conditions, 5.86.



In the auto test that was made between the General Post Office and Upham's Corners, the route followed was not stated. If the auto proceeded via Roxbury the distance covered would be 5 miles. If it proceeded via South Boston the distance would be 4.4 miles. The time occupied was 13 minutes, 50 seconds. In the first case, via Roxbury, the rate of speed per hour would have been over 21 miles. In the second case, via South Boston, the rate per hour would have been over 19 miles.

This result was obviously obtained by ignoring all the service conditions. An average rate of speed more than three times that found possible under service conditions was made. It was in part made by omitting the stops required in the actual mail service, thereby saving the several minutes required to make each of those stops and take and deliver the mail. It was made by sending the auto over portions of the route at a rate of approximately 30 miles per hour (making allowance for the inevitable detention in the area of great congestion).

Similar disregard of service conditions appears in the so-called tests made in the central area of Boston. The official time shown by experience to be necessary under service conditions for an auto to move from the General Post Office to the South Station and insure train connections is 10 minutes. The auto made the distance in 3 minutes, 40 seconds. The official time from the Boston Post Office to the North Station is 12 minutes. The test auto made the distance in 5 minutes, 5 seconds. These figures show the extent to which the relative absence of traffic congestion during the months of July and August influenced the result.

On the one hand, we have the time schedules based upon long and continuous experience, established with due regard to traffic obstacles and to service stops. On the other hand, we have single tests made regardless of service conditions, with the obstacles of traffic congestion largely eliminated, omitting the time required for stops at intermediate stations, and carried on at an unlawful and highly dangerous rate of speed.

Similar conditions obtained in the case of the Chicago tests. The official time upon which autos are daily moving between the

General Post Office and the stockyards, with one stop, is 52 minutes, the rate of speed per hour being 6.92 miles. In the so-called auto test the distance was made in 17 minutes, the service stop required in actual service being omitted. The average rate of speed was over 21 miles an hour, probably reaching 30 miles an hour over a considerable part of the course.

The Postmaster General assumes that the results of these tests indicate the regular and normal speed of the service which can be provided by automobiles. If that be true, the administrative officials of the principal post offices in the United States are convicted of gross incompetency, for consuming in actual service more than three times the time which the Postmaster General appears to believe a reasonable and practicable time.

### III. EXCESSIVE AND DANGEROUS SPEED WAS MADE THROUGH CROWDED CITY STREETS.

It has been shown above that the regular time schedules imposed by contract upon the mail service in the several cities contemplates a rate of speed limited by the congestion of city streets, speed laws, traffic regulations, and similar obstructive conditions.

The public of every large city is in a state of violent indignation and alarm because of the dangerous conditions arising from the rapid movement of automobiles in crowded city streets. The fatalities and accidents from this cause are numerous. In the City of New York one person is killed every fourteen hours, and one person is injured every twenty-three minutes. The problem of preventing undue speed, of protecting life, and of dealing with traffic congestion is one of the most pressing with which city officials everywhere are confronted.

In response to public demand and in the interest of public safety, laws limiting the speed of vehicles have everywhere been adopted. "Safety First" is the universal cry.

In defiance of an earnest and reasonable public sentiment, we

find the agents of the United States actively promoting highly dangerous conditions. We find the Postmaster General of the United States seriously proposing that those dangerous conditions shall be made the regular and daily conditions for the operation of mail vehicles—that those vehicles shall regularly and habitually traverse city streets with reckless disregard of human life and safety, and shall ignore and over-ride the laws and regulations made necessary for the public protection.

The recommendation of the Postmaster General is based upon the assumption that mails will be transported through the streets by autos at the speed shown by the recent tests. Unless that speed is maintained the present celerity of mail movement, attained by the use of the tubes, will be materially lessened. That speed is therefore proposed by the Department.

The auto speed developed by the tests, and accepted by the Postmaster General as a normal standard of performance was as follows:

#### BOSTON:

##### GENERAL POST OFFICE TO UPHAM'S CORNERS.

Distance (via Roxbury)*.....	5 miles
Time .....	13 min. 50 sec.
Rate per hour.....	over 21 miles

#### CHICAGO:

##### GENERAL POST OFFICE TO STOCK YARDS.

Distance .....	over 6 miles
Time .....	17 min.
Rate per hour.....	over 21 miles

In each of these tests a mile or more of the distance was through an area of intense congestion, in which area only a very slow rate of progress was possible. The official time schedules of the Boston Post Office allow ten minutes for an auto to traverse only a part of this congested area. A similar official

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\*The tubes follow the Roxbury route, with which the auto tests were compared. The regular auto route to Upham's Corners is via South Boston. The distance via the latter route is 4.4 miles. If this route were taken in the auto test, the average rate of speed would have been slightly more than 19 miles per hour.



time allowance is made in Chicago. Allowing for inevitable delays in these highly congested districts, a much higher rate of speed than the average must have been maintained over the remainder of the route.

It is practically certain therefore that over the larger part of the routes stated the test autos must have been driven at a rate of speed in excess of thirty miles per hour, through densely populated districts, in defiance of speed laws, traffic regulations and public safety.

In fact, however, this speed would not and could not be maintained under service conditions, for reasons stated in the previous section. But nevertheless it was advanced by the post office committee as though it were the normal speed practicable for mail autos; and the Postmaster General and Congress were permitted to infer that this artificial and impracticable rate of auto movement proved that the mails could be moved as rapidly and efficiently by autos as by tubes.

#### IV. THE RESULTS OF THE SPEED TESTS MADE UNDER EXCEPTIONAL SELECTED CONDITIONS WERE ACCEPTED AS REPRESENTING THE PRACTICABLE SPEED OF AUTOS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, UNDER SERVICE CONDITIONS SUBJECT TO WIDE VARIATION.

It has been shown above that the conditions affecting the speed of autos passing through city streets are subject to wide variations at different seasons of the year. It has been shown that the so-called tests of auto speed were made at a time when traffic congestion was at a minimum and an exceptionally high rate of speed therefore practicable. It has been shown that in the tests the usual and necessary service routes were disregarded, and that the usual and necessary stops at intermediate stations, involving



in the case of each station a considerable time for delivering and receiving mail, were omitted. It has been shown that the actual service time established and shown to be necessary as the result of continuous experience during years is from two to three times that shown by the tests. It has been shown that when the streets are obstructed by snow and ice it is necessary to more than double the usual service time, and that even with such additional time many train connections are missed. It has been shown that excessive and dangerous speed was made through crowded streets in violation of traffic regulations and speed laws.

It is obvious that all the conditions recited must of necessity be considered and allowed for in determining the habitual and regular speed of mail autos when carrying the mails under service conditions. It is equally obvious that any fair investigation for the purpose of determining the practicable speed of autos in mail service would have given full consideration to all these limiting conditions and have fully and candidly stated in the report their effect and the extent to which they should qualify the conclusions.

The report of the committee of postal employees is silent upon all of these points. Having made certain tests under conditions which excluded nearly all the most formidable impediments to high speed, they have presented those results as though they were applicable throughout the entire year and as though they could properly be made the ordinary standard of auto performance.

As a matter of fact, the report in question ignored or suppressed the essential facts indispensable to a true conclusion. It is this investigation which the Postmaster General characterizes as "thorough," and upon which, "after careful consideration," he bases his recommendations for the substitution of autos for tubes, on the assumption that the former will provide service equally efficient as that of the latter.

Upon this evidence, which has suppressed the essential and suggested the untrue and misleading, the Postmaster General rests his statement that the Department "never at any time has made a recommendation looking to the improvement of the postal service which it is more certain is just and meritorious than the proposed action with reference to this pneumatic tube service."

## V. THE RAPIDITY AND CAPACITY OF THE TUBES WAS UNDER-STATED. ON ONE OCCASION THE OPERATION OF THE TUBES WAS RETARDED.

The capacity of the tubes is dependent upon the quantity or weight of mail matter which can be contained in each of the carriers, and the frequency with which such carriers can be dispatched through the tubes.

The report of the committee of Post Office officials alleges:

“a. The capacity of each tube container is limited to about five pounds of letter mail and all classes of mail cannot be carried.”

In the hearings before the House Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads a standard carrier was placed in evidence. Numerous packages containing envelopes with blank letter sheets of different sizes and thicknesses, and also a proportion of cards similar to postal cards, were produced, weighed before the Committee and deposited in the carriers. Ten pounds of these packages (which were carefully examined by the Committee and admitted to be fairly representative of regular mail) were placed in the carrier, which was but two-thirds filled. There were, however, no long envelopes in the parcels, but ample space remained to permit the inclusion of such long envelopes.

The committee's report further stated:

“b. Rapidity of despatch of tube containers is limited to intervals of about 15 seconds, so that only about 20 pounds of letter mail can be despatched each minute . . .”

In the Boston test of the mail carried by train No. 53, June 28, 1916, six carriers were despatched in 65 seconds, making an average of 10  $\frac{5}{6}$  seconds' interval between the carriers.

As testified at the hearing, the time intervals noted in the despatch of certain mails by tube in the Chicago Post Office was found to be less than ten seconds.

In the New York Post Office on August 19 between the hours of 7 and 8 o'clock P. M., 838 carriers were despatched from the General Post Office, through a single line of tubes, the intervals between the despatches being about  $4\frac{1}{4}$  seconds.

In view of these well-established results, it is obvious that the committee's statement that only about twenty pounds of letter mail can be despatched each minute is incorrect. The facts cited, however, are advanced only to show the loose methods and the loose statements of the committee. It is correct to state that the service intervals between the despatch of tubes is in usual practice about 15 seconds, although the tube is capable of greater expedition. The actual speed, however, is dependent upon the celerity with which mail is prepared for despatch by the postal clerks. When the postal clerks are slow or insufficient in number the intervals become greater. The actual quantity carried by the carriers is likewise affected by the speed with which the clerks prepare the packages and the number of letters contained in such packages.

While, therefore, the tubes are capable of moving mail at a much higher rate of speed than that stated by the committee, and while each carrier will contain more than twice the weight stated, the average, under service conditions, is probably approximately correct. This, however, is no excuse for the bald statement of the committee that the capacity is actually limited to the amount and the time stated.

On Sunday, July 30, a test was made in Boston of the rapidity with which the tubes would handle the mail arriving by train No. 30. Seventy-seven carriers were despatched in 34 minutes, 38 seconds, the interval between the despatch of the carriers thus being 27 seconds, or about two and one-half times as great as that shown by results under actual service conditions. The results thus obtained were put in comparison with the time required for movement by autos of the corresponding mail arriving one week later.

The result was trikingly unfavorable to the tubes, the time required by the tubes being approximately twice that required by



the auto. On Sundays a minimum number of postal clerks is on duty. The demand for rapid transmission of the mail is slight, there being no local deliveries and the requirements as to train connections being such as to permit leisurely handling. It is probable, therefore, that on the occasion of this so-called test the slow rate of speed of the carriers is to be accounted for by the lack of the necessary clerical assistants required to prepare the mail for handling by the carriers. But no statement on this point is made. The inference is therefore invited that the slow rate of movement, and the consequent unfavorable showing was due to the incapacity of the tube, when in fact the entire volume of mail could have been moved in about one-third the time actually consumed had the postal clerks promptly prepared it for the carriers.

The conditions were likewise peculiarly favorable to the quick movement of autos, there being no street congestion whatever by reason of the fact that the test was made on Sunday. Thus, the movement of the tubes was retarded and the movement of the autos was expedited. The report contains no allusion to this disparity in conditions.

## VI. TWO OF THE MOST IMPORTANT AND USEFUL FUNCTIONS OF THE TUBE SERVICE WERE IGNORED BY THE REPORT.

The report of the committee of post office officials says:

“The principal advantages of pneumatic tubes for the transportation of mail are:

“1. A high rate of speed between stations for limited quantities of mail.

“2. Freedom from surface traffic congestion.”



This is but a partial statement of the advantages and utilities of pneumatic tube movement. It ignores and omits two of the most important and useful functions of the tube service, namely:

a. Despatch of late mails which would otherwise not catch specific trains.

b. Expedition of local mail interchange by reason of continuity of service and more speedy movement.

In all large city post offices mails in large volume pour into such offices in a practically continuous stream. It is sorted as fast as received, placed in pouches and at a fixed minute is despatched by auto to connect with specific outgoing trains. After the despatch of the last auto destined for a specific train mail which should go by that train continues to arrive. This late mail is forwarded by the tubes, at the rate of from two thousand to three thousand letters per minute, and the supplemental despatch continues for approximately ten minutes and in some cases a longer time.

This supplemental service could not under any conditions be performed by autos. It is made possible only by the existence of the tubes; and the service thus performed is of very great value to the business community, inasmuch as it advances the delivery of probably a hundred thousand letters every day by a period varying from a few hours to twenty-four hours or more. Without this supplemental service a great volume of important letter mail would fail to move by the most desirable trains, would therefore miss important connections in all sections of the country and be greatly retarded in its movement.

The extent and value of the service rendered may be illustrated by the case of the Transcontinental Express which leaves the Grand Central Terminal, New York, at 9:30 each evening. This train carries a very heavy mail for all important Western points, particularly those beyond Chicago and on the Pacific Coast. Mail carried by it makes close connections and reaches its destination in the shortest possible time. Mail which misses

this train is subject to a delay of from twelve to twenty-four hours, according to destination. This train also connects with the Pacific steamships, and if mail destined for Asia or Australia fails to connect with the Transcontinental Express, a delay of from two to three weeks in delivery follows.

The last auto connecting with this train leaves the Hudson Terminal at 8:40 P. M. After departure of the last auto a supplemental despatch by pneumatic tube continues for ten minutes additional, the last carrier leaving at 8:50. A supplemental despatch for this particular train is likewise made from all the branch post offices between the Hudson Terminal and the Grand Central Terminal. After the last auto has left with mail for the Transcontinental Express from 10,000 to 12,000 letters for Western points are deposited in the various branch offices and forwarded by the tube.

This supplemental service is of the utmost importance inasmuch as it avoids from twelve to twenty-four hours' delay in the delivery of from 10,000 to 12,000 letters, nearly all of which comprise banking and business correspondence which it is highly important shall reach its destination at the earliest possible moment.

This illustration applies to every important mail train leaving the City of New York. The volume of supplemental letter mail thus expedited by the existence of the pneumatic tube equals or exceeds the entire daily mail of cities of the size of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The abolition of the pneumatic tube would deprive the several large cities of the great benefit of this supplemental movement, which function could not be performed by automobiles under any conditions.

Postmaster Morgan has testified that under conditions of snow and ice it is necessary to close the mails to be despatched by autos about one-half hour earlier than usual. All the mail reaching the Post office during this half-hour, if dependent upon autos, would miss the next following train, and be delayed often many hours. It is all despatched by the tubes and is thus enabled to

make the closest and most desirable train connection. The tubes, therefore, in the winter season prevent delay to a very large part of all letter mail and render a highly important service which autos are incapable of rendering.

Had it not been for the facilities afforded by the tubes during the past winter a very large portion of the outgoing mails would have failed of their proper train connections and been subjected to delays in reaching their destinations ranging from several hours to a day or more.

Another function of prime importance performed by the tubes, and possible only by their use, is the expediting of local mail deliveries. More than 1,000,000 letters are deposited in the New York Post Office every day for local delivery. A very large proportion of these reach their destination within two to four hours' time. By reason of the speedy movement afforded by the pneumatic tube a letter may be despatched to an address twelve or fifteen miles distant and the sender may receive a reply the same day. The movement of the entire volume of local mail is greatly expedited in every city having a pneumatic tube. This expedition of local mail is an extraordinary and greatly appreciated public convenience and to abolish the conditions which make it possible would certainly be the cause of great discontent and public indignation.

The part played by the pneumatic tube in local service may be illustrated by the movement of local mails between widely separated branch post offices in New York. A letter deposited in the most northerly postal station served by the tube in Manhattan, addressed to the most southerly station, will be immediately despatched by the continuous service of the tube and received at the southerly station in 46 minutes, and within a few minutes thereafter will be delivered by carrier to the addressee. If sent by auto it would require 2 hours and 31 minutes' transmission time, and in addition might lie in the Harlem Post Office from one to two hours awaiting the despatch of an auto. The intervals between the movements of autos, plus the time required in transmission, would aggregate approximately four hours or more,



so that letters mailed at noon or later would reach their destination too late for delivery the same day.

In the case of letters mailed in Harlem and destined for Brooklyn, the time required for auto delivery would be materially greater, so that very few letters in such case would reach their destination on the day of mailing. Thus, in the case of New York, a population of 5,600,000 people has its local mail, aggregating over 1,000,000 letters every day, expedited by the use of pneumatic tubes from two to four hours or more, whereby the handling of local letters has become exceedingly efficient.

The pneumatic tube is the utility which alone makes this possible.

No allusion to these highly important functions of the pneumatic tube is made by the report of the committee of postal employees.

## VII. THE BENEFITS OF PNEUMATIC TUBES ARE NOT RESTRICTED TO THE CITIES IN WHICH THEY ARE LOCATED, BUT ACCRUE TO THE ENTIRE COUNTRY.

By far the greater part of the entire volume of mails originates in, or is directed to, the great cities. The celerity of mail movement throughout the United States is in large degree dependent upon the celerity with which the mails are handled in those cities. The conditions of modern business are such that rapid movement of mails is of the first importance to the merchants and business men of every locality, however remote.

An immense volume of daily business transactions is dependent upon and regulated by the daily mail movement, and a delay in mails or their slow movement tends greatly to retard those transactions. So pressing is the need for speedy communication that the volume of telegraph transactions between country merchants



and city centers has in recent years grown enormously and is constantly increasing. It is, therefore, necessary that business letters despatched from all sections of the country shall reach their destination in the shortest possible time, and that the reply necessary to complete such transactions shall likewise be received at the earliest possible moment.

Slow handling of the mails in cities like New York, Chicago and Boston, therefore, not only inconveniences but interferes with the necessary business operations of the entire circle of customers of those cities, and every one of those customers is benefited by the use of pneumatic tubes in the centers where mail congestion is greatest, and where slowness of mail movement entails ultimate delay of possibly many hours.

The abolition or curtailment of the tube service in any of the great cities, therefore, would materially decrease the expedition of correspondence between the country districts and the cities, and impose great inconvenience upon every section of the country.

The same reasons apply with added force to the mail movement between the great cities. The business transactions between these cities are of enormous extent and of a nature which require the utmost possible expedition. To abolish or curtail the tube service in any of the cities where it now exists not only affects the people of a particular city, but affects the business men of all the cities, by lengthening the time required for the interchange of correspondence. It is for that reason that the City of New York contends earnestly for the retention of the existing tubes in other cities, for their removal will not only inconvenience the people of Boston, St. Louis, Philadelphia and Chicago, but will interfere with the prompt transactions of business between the merchants of New York and the merchants of those cities.

New York further objects to the specific recommendations made by the Postmaster General with reference to the tube service in this city. The entire system as it now exists is essential properly to meet the local needs of this community. The proposal of the Postmaster General makes possible, and even probable, the discontinuance of that part of the system north of 42nd Street.

The section north of 42nd Street not only contains a great number of the most important hotels, clubs, etc., but is also thickly interspersed with important business establishments, the number of which is increasing with great rapidity. The tubes in that section serve a population of more than two million people and provide the sole means whereby local letters can promptly be interchanged with other sections of the city.

We strenuously object to any contingent provisions in the advertisement for contracts which shall permit the Postmaster General to discontinue the tube service in that section.

This phase of the question was considered by the Pneumatic Tube Postal Commission, appointed by Congress in 1912. Senator Hoke Smith was Chairman of that Commission, which reported on October 24, 1914, as to the expediency of discontinuing any part of the existing system. The Smith Commission said:

“In most of these cases, however, it is found that such sections are part of a general system of tubes, and that it would be inadvisable to eliminate these parts and *thereby impair the usefulness of the whole system.*”

The proviso that the Postmaster General may cancel the contracts on six months' notice is highly objectionable. Such a provision in the contract would cripple the company subject thereto, as it would make it impossible for it to provide funds to make the necessary changes and extensions required for the efficiency of the service.

This Association, therefore, contends that as to the City of New York, the present system should be retained in its entirety under a single contract covering the period of ten years, without any provision for arbitrary cancellation.

## VIII. SUMMARY.

The soundness of the Postmaster General's recommendations rests wholly upon the soundness of so-called tests of the relative

speed and utility of autos and tubes. His proposition is that autos equal tubes in efficiency and will move the mails with equal celerity at a lesser cost. He assumes that this is proved by the so-called speed tests.

To sustain that proposition would require that the regular movement of autos equal that developed by the tests. We have shown the character of these tests,—that they afford no indication of the speed practicable under service conditions, and that any conclusions based thereon are therefore misleading. It has been shown that auto movement is subject to serious obstruction from traffic congestion, speed laws, snow and ice, and stops required at intermediate stations; and that for these reasons the actual service speed is very much less than that assumed, as the result of the so-called tests, to be practicable.

It has been shown that the so-called tests ignored all of these factors of obstruction, and that the results were presented as though they were typical and fairly representative of the conditions to be met.

Such is not the fact. It is proved by the experience of every important post-office in the country that the actual service rate of speed of autos is not more than one-third that presented by the report of the committee of postoffice employees and accepted by the Postmaster General. We have shown that the most important functions of the pneumatic tubes and their most important advantages were ignored or minimized by the committee. While the auto mail service in this city was disorganized and inefficient for many days in succession during last Winter, the pneumatic tube service continued without interruption, and by reason of its existence the entire volume of outgoing letter mails originating in this city was despatched without delay. On those occasions the mail service would have been absolutely crippled had it **not** been for the existence of the tubes.

Every day the tube service accomplishes the prompt despatch of probably 100,000 letters that, without such service, would be subjected to several hours, and on some occasions, days, of delay. The tubes expedite the delivery of local letters aggre-



gating 1,000,000 daily by from two to four hours at certain periods of the day, and by twelve to fifteen hours at other times. The service rendered by the tubes is of a kind wholly impossible to autos under any conditions. They serve a genuine and important public need. Their abolition or their restriction would greatly reduce the present celerity of mail service and would deprive the public of a most useful facility.

In its report, Senator Hoke Smith's Pneumatic Tube Postal Commission said:

"The pneumatic tube service for the transmission of mails in the cities in which such service is now installed is a valuable adjunct to the mail transportation service for handling first-class, registered and special delivery mails. *not furnished by other means of transportation, and is justified by the advantages of availability, expedition, security and reliability. Its considerable withdrawal or discontinuance would be regarded as an inadvisable curtailment of facilities.*"

For all these reasons, this Association contends that the tube service should be retained without reduction in each of the cities where it now exists, and that it should be extended as rapidly as possible to other important centers of mail traffic.

THE MERCHANTS' ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK.

WM. FELLOWES MORGAN, *President.*

WM. FELLOWES MORGAN,  
WILLIAM C. BREED,  
WILLIAM HAMLIN CHILDS,  
WILLIAM A. MARBLE,  
WALDO H. MARSHALL,  
LEWIS E. PIERSON,  
HENRY R. TOWNE,  
*Executive Committee.*



## II. FROM THE MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK TO THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, PROTESTING AGAINST ADDITIONAL MAIL TRUCKS IN THE CITY'S STREETS.

CITY OF NEW YORK  
Office of the Mayor

December 29, 1916.

HON. CHAMP CLARK,  
Speaker, House of Representatives,  
Washington, D. C.

*Dear Sir:*

Permit me to direct your particular attention to the Bill now before the House of Representatives which, if enacted, will deprive the City of New York of a large part of its pneumatic tube service for the transmission of mails, requiring in place thereof the introduction of auto vehicles driven through the city streets. I wish to impress upon you the incalculable harm that must inevitably be worked by such a measure in making more acute and dangerous the traffic conditions, which already present a problem of alarming proportions.

The present tube system in this city covers all that part of the Borough of Manhattan lying south of 125th Street; a connection between the Manhattan and Brooklyn General Post Offices; an extension from the Brooklyn General Post Office to the Long Island Railroad Station.

The Bill (its legislative number I do not have at hand) had, I believe, as its sponsor the Postmaster General, and, having already been favorably reported out of committee, will shortly come before the House for consideration. It calls for the renewal of the tube service only as to that part of the system which is located south of 42nd Street and for the line connecting the two General Post Offices—thus leaving unprovided for that portion north of 42nd Street in the Borough of Manhattan, and the present extension from the Brooklyn General Post Office to the

Long Island Railroad Station, at the corner of Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues in Brooklyn. It is contended by the advocates of the Bill that the continuance of the complete tube service in its present form is not warranted by the cost, and the Postmaster General has endorsed that clause in the report of a committee of Post Office employees which says:

"\* \* \* \* We are recommending that a separate advertisement be issued for the service north of Grand Central and Times Square Stations, but that the contract be not renewed unless a very material reduction in cost is secured."

It is further proposed that if contracts are entered into they shall be for the term of ten years, but subject to cancellation by the Postmaster General on six months' notice.

The many reasons against the proposed abridgement of the present system will be presented to Congress convincingly and in detail by the leading commercial organizations of the city. I shall not, therefore, rehearse the arguments dealing with the subject from a business standpoint which will be presented by others—arguments in favor of efficiency and labor-saving devices with which I am in hearty accord. But I do wish to dwell particularly upon one phase of the subject which seems to me to overshadow all others, vitally affecting, as it does, every inhabitant of this city; namely, the shortsightedness and folly of doing anything which must inevitably add to the great congestion of street traffic and the dangers resulting therefrom.

Impressed though the casual observer must be by the sight of automobile traffic through the chief thoroughfares of this city, only those who have given the subject some study have any idea of the size of the problem now confronting the city government. It is a problem of providing protection to human life which is daily endangered by the great current of vehicles passing through our streets.

The extent of this danger is forcibly illustrated by the fatalities and accidents which are of daily and hourly occurrence. Last year 659 people were killed and 23,000 injured in street accidents, 281 of those killed being children. Thus, one person was killed every fourteen hours and one injured every twenty-three minutes of each day in the year. Of those killed, 105 met their death from motor trucks. *Despite the fact that motor trucks number less than two and one-half per cent. of the total vehicles, they were chargeable with more than sixteen per cent. of the*

*fatalities, a striking instance of the dangerous character of that class of vehicles, among which are included mail trucks.*

This annual toll of human life in our city streets has excited public indignation and alarm. Constant and urgent appeals are made for measures of protection. Stringent traffic rules have been adopted and 650 policemen have been assigned exclusively to the regulation of traffic. Every possible effort is put forth to restrict the speed of vehicles in the street, and to secure such regularity of movement as shall permit an even and orderly flow of traffic. By reason, however, of the enormous number of vehicles and the great population which daily use our streets, the situation is hard to cope with, and is becoming increasingly difficult.

The resident population of the City of New York is now about 5,600,000. Careful estimates show that this is increased daily by a floating population of over one million, making the aggregate of over six and one-half million people who use our streets daily. The number of vehicles in the city is:

Pleasure automobiles .....	116,065
Commercial automobiles .....	21,330
Dealers' automobiles .....	2,974
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Total automobiles .....	140,369
Horse-drawn vehicles .....	73,727
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Grand total .....	214,096

To this must be added many thousand vehicles, in large part automobiles, which daily enter the city from adjacent territory. The increase in the number of automobiles registered in this city in the year 1916 was 38,000. More than one-half of the population concentrates daily on the island of Manhattan, and passes along its streets. There is a corresponding concentration of vehicles, and the regulation of this enormous mass of traffic is difficult in the extreme.

So much for the general situation. Let me direct your special attention to conditions in those portions of the city where the present pneumatic tube service is endangered by the pending Bill, viz: (1) that covered by the portion of the tube system north of 42nd Street in the Borough of Manhattan, and (2) the area of the Borough of Brooklyn, along the line of the exten-



sion from the General Post Office of that Borough to the Long Island Railroad Station at Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues.

The north and south main arteries of vehicular traffic in Manhattan are at present taxed to capacity. Forty-second Street marks approximately the crest of the traffic wave. The congestion from Forty-second to Fifty-ninth Street is about the same as for the corresponding distance below Forty-second Street. From Fifty-ninth Street north in the Borough of Manhattan the main arteries for vehicular traffic are reduced by the obstruction of Central Park, which lies between Fifth and Eighth Avenues and extends from Fifty-ninth Street to One Hundred and Tenth Street, a distance of two and one-half miles. Even above Central Park in the Borough of Manhattan the congestion of traffic is great.

A traffic tabulation at Fifty-ninth Street, Broadway and Columbus Circle showed that there are more vehicles passing this location than at any other point in the Greater City. During the ten hours from 8:30 A. M. to 6:30 P. M., 39,200 vehicles and 81,990 pedestrians passed this street intersection.

Following is a tabulation of some of the congested points in Manhattan from Fifty-ninth Street north:

10-HOUR PERIOD FROM 8:30 A. M. TO 6:30 P. M.

<i>Location</i>	<i>Vehicles</i>	<i>Pedestrians</i>
59th Street and 2nd Avenue .....	9,260	50,040
86th Street and Central Park West.....	8,310....	12,742
86th Street and Broadway .....	13,042	23,710
96th Street and Broadway .....	10,083	29,849
110th Street and 8th Avenue .....	11,664	12,113
116th Street and 5th Avenue .....	6,625	22,568
116th Street, 7th and St. Nicholas Avenues..	11,207	20,386
125th Street and 1st Avenue .....	10,343	10,427
125th Street and 3rd Avenue .....	10,348	23,659
125th Street and 7th Avenue .....	10,565	40,119
145th Street and Lenox Avenue .....	6,623	14,538
181st Street and St. Nicholas Avenue.....	4,521	20,105
Manhattan Street and Broadway.....	8,534	28,942

Similar congestion of traffic exists in the business area of Brooklyn, lying between the General Post Office and the Long Island Station, upon the route proposed to be covered by mail vehicles. A traffic tabulation made at some of the street intersections in this vicinity showed the following results:

10-HOUR PERIOD FROM 8:30 A. M. TO 6:30 P. M.

<i>Location</i>	<i>Vehicles</i>	<i>Pedestrians</i>
Court and Livingston Streets.....	5,418	18,125
Fulton, Adams & Willoughby Streets.....	6,018	35,504
Fulton Street opposite Court Square.....	5,422	30,800
Fulton and Smith Streets .....	5,415	38,677
Fulton and Bond Streets .....	6,550	46,200
Fulton Street and Flatbush Avenue.....	8,017	30,700
Flatbush Avenue and Lafayette Street .....	6,264	26,590
Flatbush Avenue and Fourth .....	13,075	38,155
Atlantic and Fourth Avenues.....	7,006	18,940
Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues.....	6,073	19,315

The extent and density of the traffic as a whole is shown by the aggregate figures resulting from the tabulation referred to. It was found that of the 464 crossings where police officers are stationed to regulate traffic, an aggregate of about 3,407,069 vehicles and 15,545,745 pedestrians crossed at these intersections within ten hours.

The auto trucks used for carrying United States mails, although but 243 in number at the present time, are the most difficult and obstructive factor in the entire problem. Having right of way over other vehicles, they constantly disrupt and interfere with the regularity of movement which is the essence of successful traffic regulation. They turn out to either side as occasion may permit, passing around and in front of other vehicles, thereby impeding or stopping the movement of the latter. They force other vehicles to pull up short and turn out of the way. They proceed against the current of traffic in one-way streets, and often, if not habitually, exceed the speed limit.

While nominally subject to the local laws, the knowledge that these mail trucks are in the service of the United States works an unconscious but none the less real influence upon the traffic officers, who are consequently reluctant to interfere with the apparent authority of the United States.

In short, it may be safely said that each mail truck on the streets of New York, in its aspect as an ever present menace to life, limb and property, is equivalent to at least ten ordinary commercial vehicles. The adding of one avoidable mail truck to traffic conditions in New York is the creation of an unwarrantable additional hazard to life and limb.

The people of this city are confronted by conditions of the

utmost danger—conditions which are daily exacting a toll of human life and suffering. City officials are overburdened with the enormous and complex problem of the amelioration of these conditions. The proposal of the Postmaster General, as contained in this Bill, is sure to aggravate the situation and add materially to the present danger.

On behalf of the City of New York, I protest against the enactment of a measure which adopts a policy of materialism and economy where the safety of men, women and children is concerned—which, in spite of the forewarnings of those who must suffer the consequences, openly weighs the saving of dollars and cents against the greatly increased danger to human life.

I therefore urge upon you that the pneumatic tube service as it now exists in this city be continued and that the Bill now pending before Congress be amended to accomplish this result.

Very respectfully yours,

JOHN PURROY MITCHEL,  
*Mayor.*





